

Children Books Recommended by State Naturalists

When asked to name their favorite children's book, the naturalists were not able to select just one. A great number of children's nature books line their shelves. Many are wonderfully written, others beautifully illustrated -- some are both. Working in the natural resources field, many naturalists are delighted to see the increased number of nature-oriented books available for teachers, parents and children. Some authors, however, have been somewhat liberal with the facts. Their books may be filled with wonderful illustrations and storylines, but their facts are not correct. Naturalists are experts in their field, so, just like any other educator, they demand accuracy. Here are some wonderfully illustrated, written, and accurate children's books.

Beneath some book descriptions are ways naturalists use that book

To Build a Fire and Other Stories by Jack London.

Ages 12 and up

To build a Fire - Talks about being prepared; surviving

Owl Moon by Jane Yolen

Ages 2–6

Late one winter night a little girl and her father go owling. The trees stand still as statues and the world is silent as a dream. Wordlessly the two companions walk along, for when you go owling you don't need words. You don't need anything but hope.

Miss Rumphias by Clooney

Ages 4-8

Alice is a little girl who wants to travel to faraway places and live by the sea just like her grandfather. But, her grandfather tells her, there is one more thing that you must do. And that is to make the world more beautiful. This story is about how Miss Rumphius grows up, travels around the world, settles by the sea, and finds a way to fulfill her grandfather's wish.

The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle

ages 1–6

Young children can follow the little green caterpillar as he eats his way to becoming a beautiful butterfly, all while learning about another living creature.

Chipmunk Song, Joanna Cole

Ages 4-8

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be... a...Chipmunk? This beautiful book looks at being a chipmunk from the eyes of a 4-year-old girl. From the warmth of a cozy den to the harsh realities of weasels and hawks, this book contains full color illustrations that inspire the imagination. This book encourages children to live in harmony with their surroundings.

Where Butterflies Grow, Joanna Cole

Ages 4–8

This lovely and informative book imaginatively takes a child on the strange journey from caterpillar to butterfly. A concluding page of information further explains the life cycle. The science is sketchy, but the experiential approach will appeal to primary grade teachers.

The Snail's Spell, Joanna Cole

Ages 4-8

Brilliant illustrations and a short text invite an unnamed sleeping, pajama-clad child into a garden teeming with wildlife. The boy gradually shrinks until he is so small he experiences things as a snail would. The incredibly detailed drawings and the idea of shrinking to enter another world should capture children's imaginations.

Catching the Wind, Joanna Cole

Ages 4-8

Imagine waking up on a crisp autumn morning and changing into a Canada goose. In this nature fantasy a girl is transformed into a migrating goose, returning home to her bed after a full day of taking part in the experiences of the flock. This book has good science and invites the child to imagine and act out an animal's life.

Around the Pond: Who's Been Here? By Lindsay Barrett George

ages 3 and up

Join two children on a walk of discovery along the path to a pond. A page of text discusses clues left by an unseen animal, ending with the question, "Who's been here?" The opposite page presents the information in visual form, with the follow-up double-page spread revealing the animal

In the Snow: Who's Been Here? By Lindsay Barrett George

ages 3 and up

In this intriguing companion book to *In the Woods: Who's Been Here?*, William and Cammy take another journey of discovery. Clue after clue tells them and young readers what bird or animal has been there before and left its trace behind. The detailed paintings bring this memorable walk vividly to life.

In the Woods: Who's Been Here? – By Lindsay Barrett George

Ages 4 and up

Siblings William and Cammy set off on an autumnal walk through the woods near their house. Although they don't see any wildlife on their trek, they do observe traces of creatures' activities--including a northern oriole's nest, the remains of a red squirrel's meal, a monarch butterfly's cocoon, and a mud dauber's home. Succinct text explains the evidence the children note, ending with the question "Who's been here?" The following double-page spread provides the answer; detailed notes on the habits of these animals are appended. Two of the examples involve predator-prey relationships that may upset very young listeners, but for most children this will be an excellent introduction to classroom nature units and the perfect prelude to a walk in the woods.

These books have good science, they have good illustrations, they invite kids to think about the signs and make guesses. Used with animal tracking, wildlife id and mammals programs.

Pond Year by Kathryn Lasky -

ages 4 and up ISBN 0-7636-0112-8

Follow two best friends as they play on the banks of a pond through the cycle of a year. From floating frogs' eggs in May, to the late February thaw, the richness of pond life is revealed through informative illustrations and text.

good science and a nice story line

Dandelion Adventure by L. Patricia Kite

Ages 4-8

A spring wind sends seven dandelion seed parachutes sailing through the air. Each lands in a different place (garden, sidewalk crack, park, woodland, stream, school yard, and "a faraway land." Most of the seeds produce new plants, each with a yellow flower that is pollinated by bees and eventually produces a "feathery white ball" of new seed parachutes, ready to begin their own journeys. The book ends with four pages of "Facts about Dandelions." Preschool and primary grade teachers explaining plant cycles to children will find this a fine introduction to a familiar flower.

- nice way to explain seed dispersal, yet it's an engaging story for little kids

Snakes in the House by Faith McNulty

Ages 4-8

A boy catches a garter snake by a pond and brings it home in a jar. The snake escapes into the house and spends several days "searching for a way out, a way back to the pond." Eventually, the snake hides in a fishing basket that the boy takes down to the water. When the snake emerges, the surprised boy picks it up: "There was so much power in its tiny body; its will to be free was so strong, that the boy, in amazement, let go." The story is told from the point of view of the snake

- fun story, great illustrations, and gentle way to say that wild animals belong in the wild

Minn of the Mississippi, Holling C. Holling

Ages 9-12,

A turtle hatched at the source of the Mississippi River is carried through the heart of America to the Gulf of Mexico.

Richly illustrated account of the life and travels of a snapping turtle, which hatches in Minnesota and reaches old age at the outlet to the gulf. Natural History/Cultural History/Geography---Highly recommend. 5th grade and up

Paddle to the Sea, Holling C. Holling

Ages 9 and up

A young Indian boy carves a little canoe with a figure inside and names him Paddle-to-the-Sea. Paddle's journey, in text and pictures, through the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean provides an excellent geographic and historical picture of the region.

Squish! A Wetland Walk by Nancy Luenn,

ages 4–8,

In simple poetic language describes what a wetland is, indicates the animals that call a wetland home, and tells why wetlands are important to us. But even more, a wetland is a marvelous, muddy adventure.

PreK. A lovely picture book and exuberant exploration of a wetland.

A River Ran Wild by Lynne Cherry,

ages 6 and up

Almost six centuries ago, by the banks of a clear, clean, sparkling river, a group of Indian people found an idyllic home. Soon English settlers joined them. Inspired by the vision of the people who fought to restore the river to its original state, Lynne Cherry has created an engrossing, richly illustrated history that will encourage us to re-think the value of our natural resources and what we can do to restore them.

K-3. A chronicle of the polluting of the Nashua River and its subsequent restoration.

The Salamander Room by Anne Mazer.

ages 4–8,

Brian finds an orange salamander in the woods and takes him home. “Where will he sleep?” asks his mother. Brian describes how he will turn his bedroom into a salamander’s paradise—with shiny, wet leaves for a carpet, amphibious friends to play with, and crickets to sing lullabies. He will bring in birds to eat the insects, trees for the birds to nest in, and before long the bedroom is a lush, tropical rain forest.

Gentle introduction to ecology, also introduces the concept of what is wild stays wild and non-domesticated pets.

Brother Wolf by Harriet Peck Taylor

ages 4–8,

One day Wolf calls out to the birds—woodpecker, blue jay, cardinal, oriole, hummingbird, goldfinch, owl and wood duck—who fly to help him recover from Raccoon’s trick. Then Wolf proceeds to grant the birds’ request, that they be painted in pretty colors of the wildflowers. In the end they are as exquisite as we know them to be—and so is the Raccoon!—in this thoroughly delightful story from the Seneca.

This is a great book and really fun! It is a story from the Seneca Nation about Wolf and Raccoon and their friendship. It also explains how the birds got their beautiful colors and where Raccoon's tail got its rings.
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Coyote Places the Stars by Harriet Peck Taylor.

Ages 7 and up

In this Wasco Indian legend, Coyote's curiosity sends him skyward to learn the secrets of the heavens. When he discovers a way to move the stars, he forms likenesses of his animal friends in constellations so that they will be remembered for generations to come.

This book is about how the constellations came to be. For use with star/constellations/ astronomy lessons.

Frog Girl by Paul Owen Lewis.

Ages 9-12

This is a tale from the Pacific Northwest Native Americans. It is about a young girl who journeys to the world beneath her village's lake after all the frogs from the lake disappear. There she meets "Grandmother" who asks her where all of her frog "children" have gone? The girl must return the frogs to save her village.

For use with frog/amphibian lesson plans and about consequences of man manipulating nature

The Lorax by Dr. Seuss.

All ages,

Dr. Seuss is perhaps the most popular and best-loved children's book author of all time. Most of us have grown up with his unique characters and stories indelibly imprinted on our minds. *The Lorax* is his stunning and deeply-felt cautionary tale for youngsters that teaches the value and importance of doing our best to preserve and protect our environment.

Teaches about sustainable forestry and preserving the forest.

The Gift of the Tree by Alvin Tresselt

ages 5 and up,

The old oak tree had stood tall and proud for over a hundred years, but even as it grew, life gnawed at its heart. Termites tunneled inside it. Woodpeckers peppered it with holes. And one by one, its great branches crashed to the ground. But as the tree slowly returned to the earth, new life took over—chipmunks, raccoons, and even young trees—all nourished by the gift of the tree.

good messages about the benefits of trees, especially dead/dying trees.

Butterfly House by Eve Bunting

ages 5–8,

When a little girl rescues a caterpillar from a hungry jay, her grandfather helps her make a butterfly house to keep the larva safe. They decorate it with beautiful flowers and leaves, and they watch over it as it transforms from larva, to chrysalis, to butterfly. But as the years pass and the young girl grows old, something amazing happens each spring. The butterflies come to her garden—filling the air like autumn leaves.

Good message about life cycles of animals, and that humans play a part in keeping animals alive by our homes.

Flute's Journey by Lynn Cherry

ages 4–8,

Flute's Journey is the story of a wood thrush's first year and his arduous first migration. Flute journeys across thousands of miles—from his nesting ground in the Belt Woods in Maryland to his winter home in Costa Rica, and back again. During this journey Flute encounters many perils, including natural predators and devastating habitat loss.

Teaches about instinct, and people who are working to protect songbird habitats from destruction.

Stickeen, John Muir and the Brave Little Dog retold by Donnell Rubay

Ages 4-12,

Surrounded by deep canyons of ice, John Muir and a little black dog named Stickeen wonder – are they doomed? Why Stickeen wished to come along on this trek over a glacier in the first place, Muir did not know. He had never offered Muir friendship or asked for any affection. Would this little pup now become Muir's last companion? How Muir and Stickeen handle this challenge together, and are changed by it, creates a classic story. Muir later wrote of this adventure in Alaska in the summer of 1880, as "the most memorable of all my wild days." Near the beginning of the Twentieth Century, both children and adults alike implored Muir to tell this favorite story. Muir's written version is difficult for present day children to understand, however. Therefore it is now retold using many of Muir's original words,

Wonderful story of human and animal courage. Combined with the original writing, compare and contrast writing styles of past and present.

Walking with Mama by Barbara White Stynes

Ages 2-7, ISBN 1-883220-57-2

What sweet intimacy a mother and child share when walking together in nature! The toddler, way up high in a backpack, can see so very far. It's bouncy and warm, too. Mother and child not only discover the wonders of nature but also deepen the wonders of love.

What's in the Pond? By Anne Hunter

ages 4–8 ISBN 0-395-91224-5

What would you see if you sat at the edge of a pond and looked into the water? In this hand-size book, Anne Hunter illustrates in loving detail the creatures that live in and around a pond—a water spider, a tadpole, a red-winged blackbird, a painted turtle, and more. Each illustration is accompanied by simple yet detailed text describing the animal's characteristics and habits.

What's Under the Log? By Anne Hunter

ages 4–8 ISBN 0-395-75496-8

What are the things that scurry away when you turn over a log? With beautifully detailed illustrations, Anne Hunter shows the creatures a child might find there—a sowbug, a salamander, a millipede. Each illustration is accompanied by simple yet detailed text explaining the nature and habits of the animals that find shelter under a log.

Once There Was a Tree by Natalia Romanova

ages 5 and up ISBN 0-14-054677

An old tree is split by lightning and then felled by a woodsman so all that remains is a stump. However, the old tree is not really dead, for beetles, ants, birds, a bear and even a man find ways to use the stump as the seasons change. All of them believe the stump belongs to them and them alone. But the stump is part of the earth, and the earth belongs to all.

This story speaks of “human” and other uses for natural things and how each of us plays a part in each others lives. Everything is interconnected. Uses of old tree stumps.

The Big Tree by Bruce Hiscock

ages 6–10 ISBN 1-56397-810-5

In 1775, a small seed sprouted in a dark forest. Now that sprout is an extraordinary sugar maple tree. Time and people have changed over the past two hundred years, but the tree goes on, silently providing shade and shelter, a living link with the past. Intertwining botany and history, Not only is the story of the tree and its growth told, but also the lives of the people and animals who have lived near this ancient maple.

My Side of the Mountain by Jean Craighead George

ages 8 and up ISBN 0-14-131242-4

Sam Gribble is terribly unhappy living in New York City with his family, so he runs away to the Catskill Mountains to live in the woods—all by himself. With only a penknife, a ball of cord, forty dollars, and some flint and steel, he intends to survive on his own. Sam learns about courage, danger, and independence during his year in the wilderness, a year that changes his life forever.

Julie of the Wolves by Jean Craighead George

ages 10 and up ISBN 0-06-440058-1

Miyax rebels against a home situation she finds intolerable. She runs away toward San Francisco, toward her pen pal, who calls her Julie. But soon Miyax is lost in the Alaskan wilderness, without food, without even a compass. Slowly she is accepted by a pack of Arctic wolves, and she comes to love them as though they were brothers. With their help, and drawing on her father’s training, she struggles day by day to survive. In the process, she is forced to rethink her past, and to define for herself the traditional riches of Eskimo life: intelligence, fearlessness, and love.

Girls Who Looked Under Rocks

The Lives of Six Pioneering Naturalists by Jeannine Atkins

ages 10–16 ISBN 1-58469-011-9

The six women portrayed in this book—Maria Merian (b. 1647), Anna Comstock (b. 1854), Frances Hamerstrom (b. 1907), Rachel Carson (b. 1907), Miriam Rothschild (b. 1908), and Jane Goodall (b. 1934)—all grew up to become award-winning scientists, writers and artists, as comfortable with a pen as with a magnifying glass. They all started out as girls who didn’t run from spiders and snakes, but crouched down to take a closer look. Often they were discouraged from getting dirty, much less pursuing careers in science. But they became enthusiastic teachers, energetic writers, and passionate scientists—frequently the only women in

their fields. They each overcame opposition and found ways to pass on their vision of how all lives in nature are beautifully connected.

The Snail's Spell by Joanne Ryder

ages 3–8 ISBN 0-14-050891-0

Brilliant illustrations and a short text invite an unnamed sleeping, pajama-clad child into a garden teeming with wildlife. The boy gradually shrinks until he is so small he experiences things as a snail would. The incredibly detailed drawings and the idea of shrinking to enter another world should capture children's imagination.

How to Hide a Butterfly & Other Insects by Ruth Heller

ages 4–8 ISBN 0-448-40477-X

For the young and young at heart, this book teaches the tricks of camouflage using insects. Its science is wonderful along with the rhyming text. Colorful and entertaining.

How to Hide a Meadow Frog & Other Amphibians by Ruth Heller

ages 4–8 ISBN 0-448-40965-8

There are lots of amphibians to discover in this vibrantly colored nature book of hide-and-seek. Ruth Heller shows how toads, salamanders, and other interesting amphibians are experts at camouflage.

Plants That Never Ever Bloom by Ruth Heller

ages 5 and up ISBN 0-698-11558-9

Rich, colorful illustrations, and informative, rhyming verse unlock a world where mushrooms glow at night and seaweed grows to be gigantic--without a flower in sight.

The Reason for a Flower by Ruth Heller

ages 5 and up ISBN 0-698-11559-7

The reason for a flower is to manufacture seeds, but Ruth Heller shares a lot more about parts of plants and their functions in her trademark rhythmic style.

Hey, Little Ant by Phillip & Hannah Hoose

ages 4–8

What would you do if the ant you were about to step on looked up and started talking? Would you stop and listen? What if your friends saw you hesitate? That's what happens in this funny, thought-provoking book. Originally a song by a father-daughter team, this conversation between two creatures, large and small, is bound to inspire important discussions. It might even answer that classic childhood question: To squish or not to squish?

Wonderful Worms by Linda Glaser

ages 3–5

Travel through the life of a worm. Using simple yet descriptive words with wonderful above and below ground illustrations, children will delight in acting like a worm.

The Raft by Jim LaMarche

ages 6 and up

Nicky isn't one bit happy about spending the summer with his grandma in the Wisconsin woods. But then the raft appears and changes everything. As Nicky explores, the raft works a subtle magic, opening up the wonders all around him—the animals of the river and woods, his grandmother's humor and wisdom, and his own special talent as an artist.

She's Wearing a Dead Bird on Her Head by Kathryn Lasky

ages 5–9

Playful illustrations bring to life the story of two determined ladies who helped form one of America's oldest preservation groups, the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

Animal Tracks by Arthur Dorros

Ages 4-8

A question is posed on each double-page spread, and readers are encouraged to guess the tracks of the next animal highlighted. Though the text presents accurate and interesting tidbits, the illustrations sometimes show distortion in size. A small gallery of life-size tracks and directions for making plaster molds enhance the book's usefulness.

Chipmunk at Hollow Tree Lane by Victoria Sherrow

Ages 4-8

Detailed drawings in colored pencil are used effectively to depict how Chipmunk, a resident of Hollow Tree Lane, prepares for winter by collecting and storing autumn foods in her burrow. Brief, factual information, a short glossary, and the identification of plants contained in the illustrations conclude the interesting look at the eastern chipmunk and its habitat. Smithsonian's Backyard Series